

MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

- Current News on Agriculture & USDA in Iraq -

Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad

Sunday, December 19, 2010

Congratulations to Russ Williams and Jim Helm - We congratulate Russ Williams and Jim Helm AgAdvisors at PRT Diyala who recently received the Department of State's Meritorious Honor Award. They were recognized for their outstanding contributions to the Diyala Initiative, a GOI-led effort to facilitate voluntary, safe and sustainable return of refugees to Diyala Province.

Cooperation Begun: Iraqi Red Meats Association and the Iraqi Veterinary Medical Syndicate – A recent meeting between the Iraqi Red Meats Association (IRMA) and the Iraqi Veterinary Medical Association demonstrated that a mutually beneficial and cooperative relationship could exist between government and the private sector. The IVMS demonstrated its laboratory capabilities as well as a short training program during the meeting. USDA Baghdad has been instrumental in standing up IRMA and in the revitalization of IVMS.

Projecting 2011 Iraq Wheat Production – Iraq and other regional Middle Eastern countries experienced their first rains of the season December 10-14, 2010. The rain will benefit the moisture-dependent areas of northern Iraq but was not heavy enough or widespread enough to ensure a successful fall planting season. Planting progress remains behind last year's level at this time. In view of this delayed and limited precipitation, Iraq will be hard pressed to match 2010's wheat production level of 2.6 million metric tons in 2011. As matters stand, we would expect a drop of 10-20% in the next wheat crop.

U.S. Date Palm Experts Visit Basrah - California businessmen and date palm experts, Tony Fortier and Bob Hull of Phoenix Agrotech, the only date palm tissue culture laboratory in the United States, visited Basrah recently. This visit was another step in collaboration between Iraqi date palm stakeholders and the California date palm industry which began last March. Mr. Fortier and Mr. Hull, along with Basrah PRT and Iraqi counterparts are designing a model date farm; creating a private California based 1-year date palm technician training program and organizing an agribusiness conference for Basrah farmers.

DID YOU KNOW

Sumar (in what today is Al Qadisiyah province in southern Iraq) was the first civilization to practice intensive year-round agriculture. By 5000 BC they used core agricultural techniques including large-scale specialized labor force. Sumar was also the site of early development of intensive cultivation of land, mono-cropping, and organized irrigation.

Personnel Update - There are currently 31 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), at Embassy Baghdad or embedded with U.S. military units. After one year of excellent agricultural capacity building with PRT Baghdad, we bid farewell to PRT Advisor Lance Daugherty.

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